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FM AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8910
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHWN/AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN PRIORITY 2083
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 0797
RUEHGE/AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN PRIORITY 0990
RUEHKG/AMEMBASSY KINGSTON PRIORITY 2772
RUEHPO/AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO PRIORITY 1124
RUEHPU/AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE PRIORITY 4664
RUEHSP/AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN PRIORITY 1828

UNCLAS SANTO DOMINGO 001859

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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STATE FOR WHA, WHA/CAR

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [DR](#)

SUBJECT: EMBASSY BANS STAFF FROM NIGHTCLUB AFTER
DISCRIMINATORY INCIDENT

¶1. (U) On July 30, the Charge Roland Bullen directed all resident official U.S. Embassy employees to refrain from patronizing &The Loft, a popular Santo Domingo nightclub. The decision was made public in a press release, in which the Charge noted that the decision was taken in response to the actions of Loft management in selectively denying entry to African-Americans Embassy employees on July 22. The Charge also noted that the recent selective denial of entry was only the latest such action by the discotheque. In 2005, the Charge, predecessor, DCM Lisa Kubiske, met with executives of several nightclubs seeking changes in admission policies following repeated denials of entry to African-American Embassy employees.

¶2. (U) The Charge telephoned Deputy Foreign Minister Trullols to inform him of the decision to refrain from patronizing the Loft, and the Embassy sent a diplomatic note on the subject. Notice of this action was also placed on the Embassy's website to advise U.S. citizens visiting the Santo Domingo of the Loft's discriminatory actions. (The full text of the press release can be found at <http://www.usemb.gov.do/prelease/LoftDisco.htm>. For the diplomatic note, see para. 10.)

BACKGROUND

¶3. (U) As outlined in the Embassy's human rights report, there is significant racial prejudice against persons of dark complexion in the Dominican Republic, and the government has done little to address the problem. Acts of discrimination are common, ranging from the petty to the more serious. In particular there are strong prejudices against Haitians, which disadvantage many Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian ancestry, as well as other foreigners of dark complexion, including African-Americans. Few government officials acknowledge the existence of this discrimination; others regularly and publicly deny that it exists.

¶4. (U) Darker-skinned Dominicans frequently report being denied entry into stores, nightclubs, and restaurants. In September 2006, a private security officer shot and killed a 22-year-old Dominican student at the popular Santo Domingo nightclub &Praia8 after a security officer's refusal of admission to her darker-skinned friend escalated into a heated argument.

PRESS AND PUBLIC REACTION

¶5. (U) Following the Embassy's press release, the Dominican press gave wide coverage to issue. On July 31, the country's leading newspaper, Listin Diario, carried front-page coverage, as did other morning dailies. Local radio and television news and commentary programs devoted significant time to the decision. The local Associated Press reporter and the Miami Herald published stories on the decision made by the Charge.

¶6. (U) A number of newspapers have opined positively on the decision. Several opinion articles were written which openly criticizing not only the Loft, but also other discotheques that routinely practice selective-entry policies. Of particular note was the fact that even media outlets that are often critical of the Embassy and U.S. foreign policy congratulated the Embassy for their stance on this issue. Pablo McKinney, poet, television/radio political analyst, and daily columnist for the left-of-center tabloid El Nacional wrote that, &For that dignified decision, we find ourselves writing this early morning to the imperialists, with love. Who could have imagined this...? I can only salute Mr. Roland's decision... and invite him to drink a couple of cold beers at a local spot in order to show him the good will of our simple people.8

GOVERNMENT REACTION

¶7. (U) On August 6, following the positive press and public reaction, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a supportive press release: &(The MFA) agrees with the position of the Embassy of the United States of America against the discotheque Loft for allegedly being racist.... It is incredible that these things occur in a country where 70

percent of the population is mulatto and 20 percent black....

Discrimination in public places violates multiple international human rights treaties to which the Dominican Republic is a signatory.8 Such a release by the MFA on a domestic matter is unprecedented. EMBOFFs have also received positive feedback from other government officials, diplomatic colleagues and private sector contacts.

MEETING WITH LOFT MANAGEMENT

¶8. (SBU) On August 7, the Charge met with the general manager of The Loft and the shift manager who was on duty the night of July 22. The meeting was requested by the Loft owner. In the meeting, the managers were defensive, claiming that racial discrimination had not taken place, but rather blaming the denial of entry on poorly educated doormen. The Loft managers maintained that the reason for denial of entry was hairstyle (specifically, braided hair), and then went into some detail about what they considered to be acceptable hairstyles. The managers further claimed that the doormen did not contact management when they denied entrance to Embassy staff. (Note: During the incident on July 22, EMBOFFs witnessed several calls from the doormen to management. In addition, one doorman stated to EMBOFFs that his supervisor had said that he was not to allow entry to &blacks.8)

¶9. (SBU) An apology was offered for the incident, but not for racial discrimination. The managers suggested that Embassy staff call in advance so that they would not be denied entry in the future (note: this is moot given the ban on The Loft). The Charge concluded the meeting by stating that he does not intend to lift the ban.

PRESS RELEASE AND DIPLOMATIC NOTE

¶10. (U) Begin text of diplomatic note.

No. 166

The Embassy of the United States of America presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the

Government of the Dominican Republic and notes the decision of Chargé d'Affaires a. i.- Roland W. Bullen of prohibiting all Embassy employees from patronizing the Loft discothèque in response to the actions of its management in selectively denying entry to African-Americans on July 22, 2007.

The Embassy notes that this recent selective denial of entry was only the latest such action by the club. In 2005 Embassy personnel met with Loft officials seeking a change in its admission policy following denials of entry to African American Embassy employees.

The Embassy of the United States considers it necessary to take this action to place the Loft venue off-limits to its employees, because of the consistent and repeated discrimination towards US Embassy employees of African descent. The US Embassy condemns such discrimination, which violates Dominican law and U.S. norms of equal access and non-discrimination towards all.

The Embassy of the United States avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of the Dominican Republic the assurances of its highest consideration.

Embassy of the United States of America,
Santo Domingo, July 31, 2007

(U) This report and extensive other material can be consulted on our SIPRNET site,
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/santodomingo/>
BULLEN